

Sayings of Zen Master Kyong Ho

Zen Master Kyong Ho (1849–1912) was the great-grandteacher of Zen Master Seung Sahn.



Kwan Um School of Zen Archives

1. Don't wish for perfect health. In perfect health there is greed and wanting. So an ancient said, "Make good medicine from the suffering of sickness."
2. Don't hope for a life without problems. An easy life results in a judgmental and lazy mind. So an ancient once said, "Accept the anxieties and difficulties of this life."
3. Don't expect your practice to be always clear of obstacles. Without hindrances the mind that seeks enlightenment may be burnt out. So an ancient once said, "Attain deliverance in disturbances."
4. Don't expect to practice hard and not experience the weird. Hard practice that evades the unknown makes for a weak commitment. So an ancient once said, "Help hard practice by befriending every demon."

5. Don't expect to finish doing something easily. If you happen to acquire something easily the will is made weaker. So an ancient once said, "Try again and again to complete what you are doing."
6. Make friends but don't expect any benefit for yourself. Friendship only for oneself harms trust. So an ancient once said, "Have an enduring friendship with purity in heart."
7. Don't expect others to follow your direction. When it happens that others go along with you, it results in pride. So an ancient once said, "Use your will to bring peace between people."
8. Expect no reward for an act of charity. Expecting something in return leads to a scheming mind. So an ancient once said, "Throw false spirituality away like a pair of old shoes."
9. Don't seek profit over and above what your work is worth. Acquiring false profit makes a fool (of oneself). So an ancient once said, "Be rich in honesty."
10. Don't try to make clarity of mind with severe practice. Every mind comes to hate severity, and where is clarity in mortification? So an ancient once said, "Clear a passageway through severe practice."
11. Be equal to every hindrance. Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment without hindrance. Seekers after truth are schooled in adversity. When they are confronted by a hindrance, they can't be overcome. Then, cutting free, their treasure is great.

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New Year's Eve is over. I suppose you also got many e-mails and messages with many greetings wishing you happiness, health, welfare and effort in your practice. And of course I sent many such greetings myself.

On this occasion of wishing each other the best, it is useful to remember the advice of our great-grandteacher, Zen Master Kyong Ho, about achievements and nonattachment to achievements.

Present trendy spiritual ways are competing with various techniques of visualization for health and welfare, enlightenment and well-being. The cult of health, we can see, grew into the cult of the body—a new kind of religion. There are books on how to make friends or how to become rich easily. By buying such a book and with a bit of imagination we get a feeling that enlightenment falls by itself into our lap. But all of these Christmas-present techniques we got under the Christmas tree have very strong wanting mind: Give me, give me, give me. I want more and more.

Our teacher's advice warns us that beyond such apparently positive wishes lies caginess, avarice and a lazy mind. Kyong Ho uncovers attachment, expectation and desire—everything that hinders our practice. This advice may seem restrictive, but actually it is compassionate advice that protects us and our co-practitioners from disappointment, pain and difficulties.

At the same time, he teaches us that we can practice with the inherent obstacles from which we try to run. We need to recycle them in order to get greater strength and inspiration, as they are essential parts of our reality and lives. Only then will we see that the understanding of Buddha nature is right here and now, not somewhere far away where we'll be rich, happy, beautiful and without problems.

That reminds me of an anecdote about an ugly man named Michal. He kind of looked like a crippled monster with black teeth, if

any, and no hair. Because of that, he was very sad and lonely. No friends or wife. He didn't go to work and was poor. He was simply a walking wreck without a future.

One day he won a lottery and became very rich. He underwent a couple of plastic surgeries, got his bones straightened, fixed his teeth. He became a completely new man. With his new self he went to the city. Each woman looked back as he went by. He was very irresistible and handsome, dressed in the best clothes. And so he smiled back and returned the looks, a fascinating man walking through the city. However because of this he wasn't careful enough and suddenly a bus ran him over and killed him.

He woke up in heaven. When he realized what had happened he ran to complain to God. "Oh God, why have you done this to me? I could now have such a beautiful life on Earth!" God looked at him for some time and couldn't understand what he was talking about. Then he asked him what his name was. The man replied: "Michal." And God said sadly: "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't recognize you at all. You look completely different . . ."

So don't forget that getting something easily and quickly is only one side of the coin. The other side is difficult and long. Having a life without problems is only one half of a life with problems. That seeking gain from your friends means to forego loyalty. That beyond quick results hides a lazy mind, and beyond seeking reward for donations hides our poverty and fear. As Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, do not create here and there, just do it. Just help this world. As an ancient text says: "Even if the sun rises in the west, the bodhisattva always knows his right job."

Whether or not it is the end of the world, keep your correct situation and your correct relationship with that situation. Then only ten thousand years, "Happy New Year." ♦